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ABSTRACT

The report examines the attitudes of parents of 31 of the 44 students in the Appalachia Education Laboratory's Employer-Based Career Education (AEL/EBCE) program toward the program as indicated by their responses to a standard interview form (which appears in an appendix). Twelve interviews involved both the mother and the father of the student; in the remaining 19 cases the student's mother was interviewed alone. Most parents felt that the AEL/EBCE program was superior to their child's previous program. All but one felt that their child also rated AEL/EBCE as superior. More than 80 percent of parents' responses regarding behavior changes in their child described positive changes. Most parents felt their child learned as much as or more than in previous programs, especially regarding job information. Parents rated on-the-job experience as the greatest strength of the AEL/EBCE program, and transportation difficulties as its greatest weakness. More than half of the parents felt the AEL/EBCE program helped their children to choose a career. Parents' criticisms generally focused on the program's permissiveness, instructional unconventionality, and insufficient applicant screening. Regarding program objectives, parents favorably rated their child's career decision-making ability, and job-related and job-skill experience. (Author/JR)

Employer-Based Career Education

TR 43

Parents' Attitudes Toward the Program as Indicated by an Analysis of Interview Data

ACHIA EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY, INC.
Charleston, West Virginia 25325
September 1973

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Cover picture: Sam Burge, an EBCE student learns the fundamentals of operating a television camera at WMUL-TV in Nitro, West Virginia

Employer-Based Career Education

Parents' Attitudes Toward the Program as Indicated by an Analysis of Interview Data

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TECHNICAL REPORT NO. 43

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Preface

This report is one of a series resulting from the evaluation of the Employer-Based Career Education (EBCE) program between September, 1972, and June, 1973. The focus of this report is the attitudes of parents toward the educational alternative provided by EBCE.

The report was written by Dr. John T. Seyfarth, West Virginia College of Graduate Studies, under contract with the Laboratory. The EBCE evaluation was conducted and supervised by Dr. James H. Sanders, Evaluation Specialist with the Laboratory, and under the general direction of Dr. Charles L. Bertram, Director of Research and Evaluation for the Laboratory. Critical reviews of early drafts of the report were provided by Mr. William H. Anderson, Associate Director of the EBCE program, and by Mr. Gary D. Shank, Learning Coordinator for the EBCE program.

Table of Contents

Preface. ii

Introduction 1

Procedures. 1

Format. 2

Findings 2

Question 1. 2

Question 2. 2

Question 3. 2

Question 4. 4

Question 5. 5

Question 6. 6

Question 7. 7

Question 8. 7

Question 9. 9

Discussion 13

Conclusion 16

Objective 1 (Student) 16

Objective 2 (Student) 17

Objective 3 (Student) 17

Objective 4 (Parent). 17

List of Tables

Tables

1 Parents' Ratings of EBCE Program Compared with Child's Previous Educational Experience. 3

2 Parents' Ratings on Child's Preference of Two Programs--EBCE and Previous. 3

3 Observed Changes in Child's Behavior or Attitude During Year as Reported by Parents 4

4 Parents' Estimates of Amount Learned by Child in EBCE Compared with Previous Program 5

5 Advantages of Previous School over EBCE Named by Parents of EBCE Students. 6

6 Advantages of EBCE Program over Previous Program Cited by Parents of EBCE Students. 7

7 Strengths of EBCE Program Cited by Parents of EBCE Students 8

8 Weaknesses of EBCE Program Cited by Parents of EBCE Students 9

9 Effect of EBCE Program on Student's Career Plans as Reported by Parents 10

10 Parents' Willingness to Repeat Decision to Participate or Permit Younger Child to Enter and Satisfaction with Feedback 13

List of Figures

Figures

1 Parental Reports of Students' Attitudes toward Career Choice after Program. 11

2 Some Parental Attitudes about EBCE. 12

Introduction

The Employer-Based Career Education (EBCE) program operated by Appalachia Educational Laboratory represents an effort to develop an alternative career education model in which students participate in planned learning experiences at employer sites including community agencies, with resource persons in the community, and in the Learning Laboratory of the EBCE center.

Forty-four high school seniors participated in the initial year of the EBCE program. The students volunteered to take part; all were enrolled in other high schools in Kanawha County, West Virginia, at the time. About half of the students began the program in September, and the others entered at the beginning of the second semester in January. All except one completed the necessary requirements for graduation and were awarded their high school diploma in May, 1973. The one exception completed graduation requirements during the summer of 1973.

As part of the evaluation of the program outcomes, parents of the students were interviewed in June, 1973, by two-person teams from the Laboratory staff. This report analyzes and summarizes data from those interviews.

Procedures

Interviews were conducted with parents of 31 of the 44 students in the program. Twelve interviews involved both the mother and father of the student. In the remaining 19 cases, the student's mother was interviewed alone. A standard interview form was followed and written notes made during the conversation. Parents who were not interviewed were omitted because of limited time and, in some cases, difficulties in scheduling an interview at a mutually agreeable time.

All of the interviews were conducted during the month of June, after students had completed the program. Thus, there was no reason for the parents

to feel compelled to report favorable opinions about the program because of the possibility of reprisals against the child.

The interviews took place at the residence of the parents in every case except one; that one was conducted at the mother's place of employment.

Format

Following the Introduction, the section on Findings presents data from the parent interviews. The format of the interview schedule (presented in the Appendix) is followed in presenting the findings. A Discussion section reviews and summarizes the conclusions of the evaluators, and the findings are related to program objectives in the Conclusion.

Findings

Question 1: How did the Career Education Program in which your child participated compared with his/her educational program from past years?

Twenty-seven of 31 parents interviewed (87.1 percent) rated EBCE better (Table 1). Their reasons included particular features of the program, such as the job experiences and individualized instruction. They also referred to evidence of improved attitudes and increased motivation.

Question 2: Do you believe that your child liked his/her program better, about the same, or worse this year as compared with last year?

Table 2 reports the results. Thirty parents (96.8 percent) believed that their children liked EBCE better, and only one parent felt that the child preferred the program of the previous school.

Question 3: Have you noticed specific changes in the behavior of your child during the past year? List positive changes and negative changes.

More than 80 percent of the 53 responses dealt with positive changes; the remainder were neutral (15.1 percent) or negative (3.8 percent). Among the

Table 1

Parents' Ratings of EBCE Program Compared with Child's Previous Educational Experiences

	Number	Percent
EBCE better	27	87.1
About the same	1	3.2
Other better	1	3.2
No answer	2	6.5
TOTALS	31	100.0

Table 2

Parents' Ratings on Child's Preference of Two Programs--EBCE and Previous

	Number	Percent
Liked EBCE better	30	96.8
Both about the same	0	--
Liked previous program better	1	3.2
TOTALS	31	100.0

changes cited by parents were increased self-assurance (28.3 percent), greater maturity and self-reliance (20.7 percent), improved attitude toward school (9.4 percent), and improved social skills (9.4 percent). These results appear in Table 3.

Table 3

Observed Changes in Child's Behavior or Attitude During Year as Reported by Parents

	Number	Percent
No change	8	15.1
More self-assured	15	28.3
More mature, independent, self-reliant	11	20.7
Better attitude toward school	5	9.4
Improved social skills	5	9.4
Other	7	13.2
Negative changes	2	3.8
TOTALS*	53	99.9

*Total exceeds 31 because of multiple responses

Question 4: Do you believe that your child learned as much in his/her subject areas this year as compared to last year?

The answers to this question were favorable to the EBCE program: 26 parents reported that students learned more (19) or about the same (7) in the EBCE program, as reported in Table 4. One parent rated the child's previous program better, and four did not answer.

Table 4

Parents' Estimates of Amount Learned by Child in EBCE Compared with Previous Program

Child Learned--	Number	Percent
More in EBCE	19	61.4
About the same	7	22.6
More in previous program	1	3.2
No answer	4	12.9
TOTALS	31	100.1

Two parents who rated their children's performance better in EBCE commented that their youngsters could have done more homework, leaving the impression that perhaps the level of expectation for students was low. But other parents felt that the quantity of the work equalled or surpassed what the child had done in previous years. One positive mother said that she was "dumbfounded" when she visited the school and saw the quantity of work her son had completed. Other parents observed that their children appeared more highly motivated since joining the EBCE. One mother attributed this difference to a feeling of importance her son acquired as a result of having been chosen to take part in the program. Seven parents commented that their youngsters appeared to understand their assignments better than in previous years, possibly as a result of more attention from staff.

On the negative side, one set of parents reported that their son received an F in typing even though he was "hunting and pecking".

Question 5: What do you believe your child would have gained more of at his/her home school?

Thirteen parents felt that the student would have gained nothing more at his previous school than at EBCE. Three cited courses offered by conventional schools which were not available through EBCE, and eight parents identified non-academic activities including social and recreational activities and athletics not offered by EBCE. Seven parents cited higher academic standards at the previous school as an advantage. These results appear in Table 5.

Table 5

Advantages of Previous School over EBCE
Named by Parents of EBCE Students

	Number*	Percent
Extracurricular activities	8	25.0
More rigorous standards	7	21.9
Wider course selections	3	9.4
No advantages	13	40.6
No answer	1	3.1
TOTALS	32	100.0

*One respondent gave two answers.

Question 6: What do you believe your child gained in the EBCE program that he/she would not have had in the home school?

Parents' responses are summarized in Table 6. The more frequently mentioned advantage of the EBCE program was the job information which students acquired from job experiences. That feature received 13 mentions. Character development was identified by ten parents as an advantage of the program. Other factors mentioned were contacts, academic skills, and social experiences.

Table 6

Advantages of EBCE Program over Previous Program
Cited by Parents of EBCE Students

	Number	Percent
Job information	13	42.0
Character development	10	32.3
Contacts	3	9.7
Academic skills	3	9.7
Social experiences	1	3.2
No answer	1	3.2
TOTALS	31	100.1

Question 7: What would you consider the greatest strengths of the (EBCE) program?

On-the-job experience was mentioned more frequently than any other item as a strength of the program (47.1 percent of all mentions). The teaching staff and relationships between teachers and students ranked second with six mentions (17.6 percent). Close behind with five mentions was the individual attention students received, and the informal atmosphere which prevailed between staff and students was mentioned by two parents as a positive factor. Table 7 summarizes these findings.

Question 8: What would you consider the greatest weaknesses of the program?

Transportation difficulties were mentioned more often than any other item as a weakness of the EBCE program and represented 17.6 percent of all responses (Table 8). Students who relied on public transportation to travel between home, school, and employment sites experienced delays and inconvenience. Five parents

Table 7

Strengths of EBCE Program Cited
by Parents of EBCE Students

	Number*	Percent
On-the-job experiences	16	47.1
Teaching staff	6	17.6
Individual attention, small groups	5	14.7
Open, informal atmosphere	2	5.9
Other	3	8.8
No answer	2	5.9
TOTALS	34	100.0

identified features of the employment phase of the program as weaknesses. The specific criticisms here had to do with the limited choice in employment sites available to students, the unavailability of hands-on experience in certain sites, and the overall quality of the experiences available to students.

Respondents who cited parental involvement as a weakness were referring to paucity of feedback concerning the child's performance as well as the lack of opportunity to express a point of view with regard to the total program. Three parents were critical of particular management decisions or procedures, specifically relating to the reassignment of students when employment experiences did not turn out successfully.

Two parents cited lack of cooperation on the part of the child's home school as a problem, and an equal number named the open campus as a weakness of EBCE. Other items mentioned were: limited course offerings, over-permissiveness on the part of the staff, failure of the EBCE program to achieve the unique-

ness originally intended, and low admission standards. Eight parents felt there were no weaknesses.

Table 8

Weaknesses of EBCE Program Cited by Parents of EBCE Students

	Number*	Percent
Transportation	6	17.6
Employment experiences	5	14.7
Parental involvement	4	11.8
Management decisions or procedures	3	8.8
Lack of cooperation by home school	2	5.9
Open campus	2	5.9
Limited course offerings	1	2.9
Over-permissiveness	1	2.9
Too much like other schools	1	2.9
Admission standards	1	2.9
No weaknesses	8	23.5
TOTALS*	34	99.8

*Total exceeds 31 because of multiple responses.

Question 9: How has the program affected your child's career plans?

Results are reported in Table 9 and Figure 1. Eighteen parents (58.1 percent) reported that their child was more sure of his choice of career as a result of his experience in the EBCE program. Eight (25.8 percent) said that

there had been no change, and two (6.5 percent) said that the child was less sure of a career choice. Three parents (9.7 percent) did not answer.

Table 9

Effect of EBCE Program on Student's Career Plans as Reported by Parents

	Number	Percent
Student more sure of career choice after year in EBCE	18	58.1
No change	8	25.8
Student less sure of career choice after year in EBCE	2	6.5
No answer	3	9.7
TOTALS	31	100.1

Table 10 and Figure 2 report responses to three questions dealing with parents' general feelings about the EBCE program and about the sufficiency of information about students' progress. Twenty-seven parents said that, were they making the decision for the first time with the benefit of present knowledge, they would still want their child to participate in the EBCE program. Twenty-six parents said that they would want a younger child of theirs to participate in the program. Two of the 26 parents had one child whom they said they would want to take part in the EBCE program, and one whom they would not like to have participate because of lack of maturity or because of the child's interest in activities not available through EBCE. Twenty-three parents felt they received sufficient information about the program.

Figure 1

Parental Reports of Students' Attitudes toward Career Choice after Program

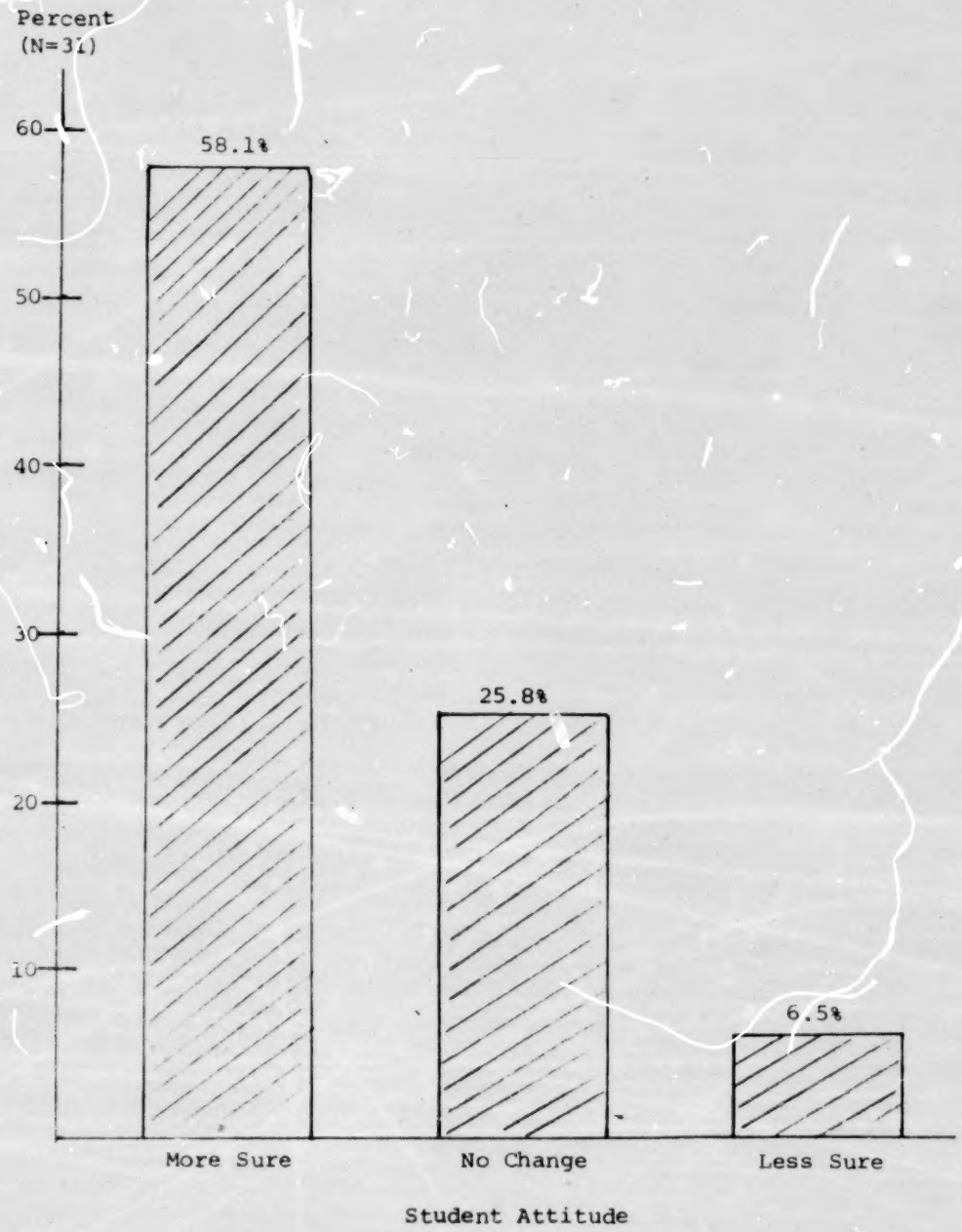

Figure 2

Some Parental Attitudes about EBCE

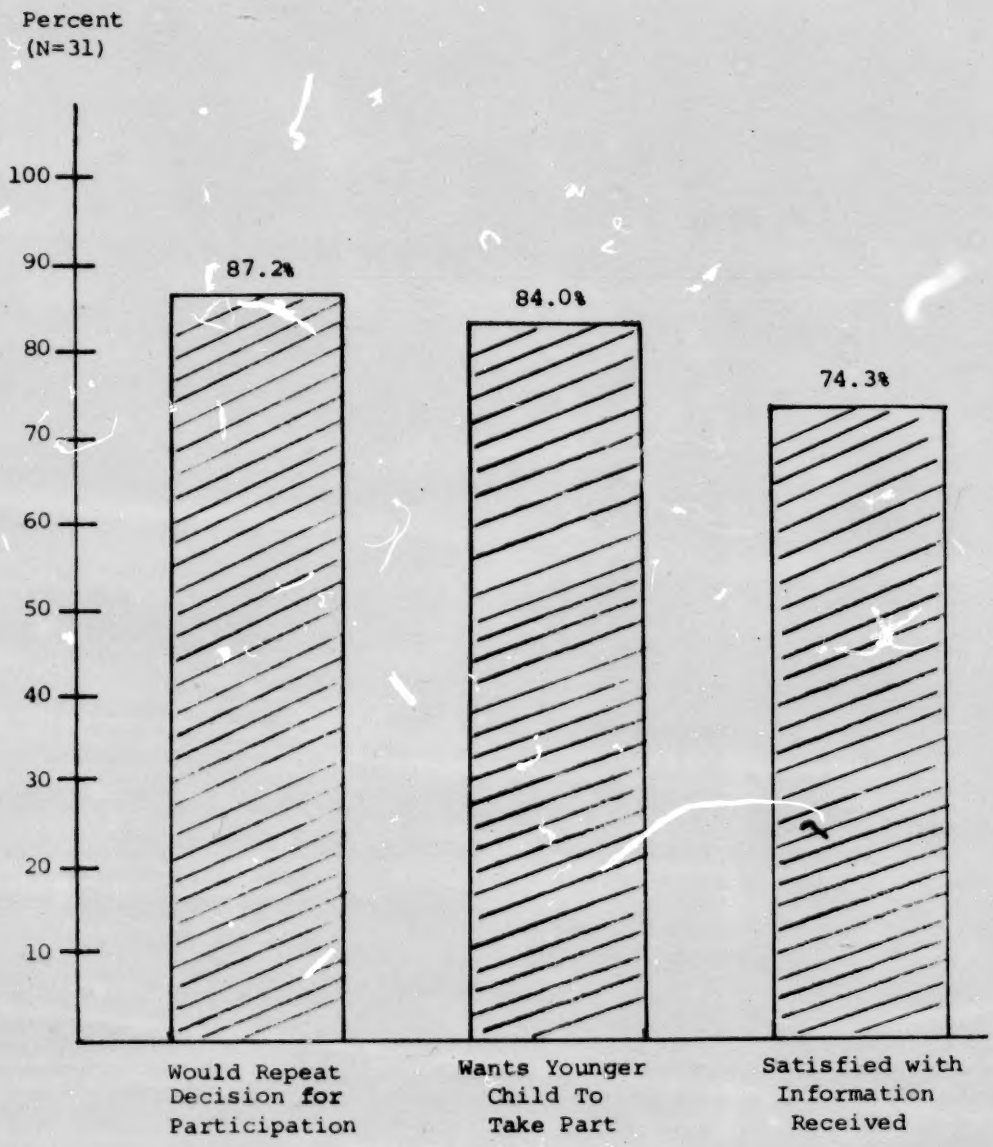

Table 10

Parents' Willingness to Repeat Decision to Participate or Permit Younger Child to Enter and Satisfaction with Feedback

	Number	Percent
Knowing what they know now, would still want child to participate in EBCE	27	87.2
Would want a younger son or daughter to participate in EBCE	26	84.0
Received sufficient information about child's progress	23	74.3

Discussion

Criticisms of the EBCE program generally related to one of the following topics:

1. Permissive practices, including the open campus concept, operation of a student lounge, and permitting students too much free time.
2. Instructional practices, including too little homework, lower academic standards than conventional schools, and lack of inclination by the staff to "push" students to perform.
3. Admission practices, or insufficient screening of applicants for the program.

Ten parents cited one or more of these criticisms during the course of the interview. However, the overall tone of their remarks tended to be positive, with one exception. Nine of the ten parents reported that their child liked the EBCE program better than that of the previous school. All except two reported having observed positive behavioral changes since the child entered the EBCE program.

In general, the parents who were critical of features of the program had children who had done well in their previous schooling. On the other side, parents of children who had not done well in the previous school--either because the demands had out-paced the child's ability or because of the child's general dissatisfaction with the regimen of the school--were highly positive about the EBCE program.

Differences between these two groups of parents originated in their expectations for EBCE. One group of parents saw the EBCE program as supplemental--i.e., offering something not available in the previous school. Nevertheless, they expected EBCE to be as "good" in other respects as the previous school. The other group of parents viewed the program as an alternative to the public schools and a new start for their child. Their expectations were vague and appear to have been fulfilled when the child's attitude improved. Their comments in some cases were effusive.

Examples:

> "You all are wonderful. You saved my son. He was afraid that he wouldn't be accepted and he was overjoyed when he was. The program gave him an aim in life."
>
> "Everything that the school could have done, they did. Everything I know about the school has been good."
>
> "Successful and important people took an interest in Bob. At the other school no one paid attention to him."

These conflicting parental expectations pose a real problem for the program management, for the emphasis on student freedom and initiative to which some parents object is the reason certain students do well in the program. In particular, those youngsters who have been alienated by the regimen of the public schools are likely to thrive in an atmosphere of trust and independence.

There are some indications that the program management may be responding to parental criticism by taking steps to impose more restrictions on students. Parents of one student, for example, complained that the EBCE program was becoming too much like other schools. They said their son had entered with the impression that he would be permitted to initiate his own academic activities, but that turned out not to be the case.

The program staff must justify its practices on the basis of the program's objectives and the needs of the clientele. However, it would seem wise to move with caution in considering changing practices which have been as successful as these appear to have been.

Several comments are in order regarding the procedures used in the parent interviews and the quality of the data. Close to one-third of the parents were not interviewed. That number of omissions necessarily raises questions about the validity of the findings. Although, as was pointed out earlier, there was no reason to believe that parents should have felt compelled to report favorable ratings of the program (other than a desire to be helpful), neither is there any assurance that the parents who were not interviewed held opinions similar to those who were.

The validity of data such as these is heavily dependent on the amount of information available to those answering the questions. The more information respondents possess, the more valid are their answers. Judging by their comments, these parents evidently knew a great deal about the program, although it is not clear whether their source of information was the students or the program itself. Three-fourths of the parents interviewed felt satisfied with the amount of feedback they received about their child's progress in the program (Table 10). That finding suggests that parents were

kept informed on at least certain aspects of program operation, which increases confidence in the validity of the data.

Some parents are in a position to provide fairly detailed accounts of a student's decision to enter the EBCE program and the subsequent mental processes engaged in during the year in the program. That information can provide useful insights into the ways in which the program affects the career decision processes of adolescents. Perhaps in subsequent evaluation efforts some of these matters can be explored. It would be interesting to see evaluation procedures designed so as to further theory development as well as to assess achievement of specific program objectives.[1]

Conclusion

Findings from the parent interviews will be examined as they bear on student- and parent-related program objectives in this section.

Objective 1: Students Will Make Realistic Career Choices Based on Their Abilities, Interests, and the Values and Requirements of the Occupation.

Nearly 60 percent of reporting parents said their child was more sure of his career choice following a year in the EBCE program (Table 9). About one-fourth reported no change, and only two parents felt that children were less sure than previously. A feeling of certainty is not to be equated with realistic choice, of course, but a decision which is realistically arrived at is more likely to generate feelings of confidence.

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[1] James H. Sanders. Employer-Based Career Education Program: Summative Evaluation Plan. Charleston, W. Va.: Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc., 1973.

Objective 2: Students Will Increase Their Knowledge of the Variety of Opportunities in the World of Work.

Thirteen parents (42 percent) cited job information as an advantage of the EBCE program over the program of the child's previous school (Table 6). Sixteen parents (47.1 percent) rated on-the-job experiences as a strength of the EBCE program (Table 7). Among 34 weaknesses of the EBCE program cited by parents, only five (14.7 percent) dealt with employment experiences (Table 8).

Objective 3: Students Will Identify the Functional, Adaptive, and Specific Skills Required for Work Situations.

Among the functional and adaptive changes in students' behavior observed by parents were these: more self-assurance (15 mentions), behavior reflecting greater maturity or self-reliance (11 mentions), improved attitudes toward school (5 mentions), and improved social skills (5 mentions) (Table 3). Together these four categories constituted 67.8 percent of all reports. Ten parents reported no change or negative changes in children's behavior.

In a similar vein, about one-third of parents interviewed rated character development potential as one of the strengths of the EBCE program (Table 6).

There was no direct information available from parents about specific occupational skills acquired by students.

Parent-related goals:

Objective 1: Parents of Participating Youth Will Have a Positive Attitude toward the Program.

The evidence for accomplishment of this objective is substantial. Eighty-seven percent of parents rated EBCE better than the child's previous

educational experience (Table 1). All except one parent reported their child liked EBCE better than the previous school (Table 2). Sixty percent of parents thought that the amount of learning in the EBCE program exceeded that in the previous school (Table 4). Forty percent felt that the previous program offered no advantages not available through the EBCE program (Table 5). Eighty-seven percent of parents would, if they were making the decision now, still want their child to participate, and 84 percent of parents would want a younger son or daughter to take part in the program.

Appendix

Parent Interview Schedule

Parent _____

Interviewer _____

Date _____ Time _____

1. How did the Career Education Program (_____) participated in compare with his (her) educational program from past years? (Possible variables: educational value, work lead, etc., overall)

   Better _____ About the same _____ Worse _____

   Explain.

2. Do you believe (_____) liked his (her) program Better _____ About the same _____ Worse _____ this year as compared with last year?

   Explain.

3. Have you noticed any specific changes in the behavior of (_____ _____) during the past year? (Examples might be more confidence, better self-concept, less disciplined, etc.)

   List positive changes.

   List negative changes.

4. Do you believe (_____) learned as much in his (her) subject areas this year as compared to last year?

   Better _____ About the same _____ Worse _____ Don't know _____

   Explain. (Probe into amount of work done, understanding, etc.)

5. What do you believe (_____) would have gained more of at his (her) home school?

6. What do you believe (_____) gained more of in the EBCE program than he (she) would have in the home school?

7. What would you consider the greatest weaknesses of the program? (Possibly a probe would be what changes...)

8. What would you consider the greatest strengths of the program?

9. How has the program affected (_____) career plans? (Have they changed?)

   More sure _____ No change _____ Less sure _____

   Explain. (One probe might be - Are you happy with the choice or decision?)

10. Would you want (_____) to participate in the program again knowing what you now know?

    Yes _____ No _____

    Why?

11. If you have (or had) a younger son or daughter, would you want him or her to participate?

    Yes _____ No _____

    Why?

12. Do you believe you have received enough information from the staff about (_____) progress?

    Yes _____ No _____

    Why or where?

13. Do you have any other comments you would like to make about the program (positive, negative, or suggestions)?

Interviewer's Summary Statement:

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